

Madam Chairman and members of the committee;

My name is Samantha Field and I'm here representing the Coalition for Responsible Home Education, the only organization founded and run by homeschool alumni to advocate for homeschooled children. I come to you today deeply troubled by some of the language contained in senate bill 2188. I would like to direct your attention to lines six through ten and specifically highlight the term "fundamental right."

As I am sure the esteemed members of this committee are aware, this is a legal term of art. In our country, every citizen has certain *fundamental* rights—the right to free speech, freedom of expression, freedom of religion, etc. These are held to the standard described in lines six through ten of senate bill 2188—otherwise known as "strict scrutiny." I'm sure we can all agree it is important that our rights to speech and religion are this highly regarded as they are some of our chief governing values. However, I caution this committee against elevating *parental rights* to the same exalted position as our other foundational freedoms.

Parents do have rights. This is not up for debate. We have the foundational rights as citizens all Americans hold in common; We also in the practice of family law and other related fields have additional rights, but – and this is important – those rights are balanced with our responsibilities and the rights of our children. We should not be granted additional *fundamental* rights *as parents*, because of the legal imbalance this creates. Our *role* as parents is at its most essential about our power *over* our children. Loving, responsible parents control nearly every aspect of our child's lives for their own safety and well-being, with that control lessening as we guide our children toward adulthood and empower them to become productive citizens. However, not every parent is loving. Not every parent is responsible.

If all parents were granted *fundamental* rights, it would be giving the *role* of parenting – a role that is chosen, not inherent to a person—absolute control over children. It would, in function, reduce the *actual fundamental rights of children to be essentially meaningless.*

I was raised in a culture that regarded parents' rights to be fundamental. My life was dominated by the powerful lobby behind this bill—the Home School Legal Defense Association and their daughter organization the Parental Rights Foundation. Because of their work deregulating homeschooling and giving homeschooling parents absolute control over their children—I did not receive a basic education. I did not progress past eighth grade. I did not receive any education in higher math, science, or literature—and have not yet had the ability to rectify this gaping lack. I was kept isolated from my peers, from my family. My culture believed women should not be educated, should not attend college, should not be employed. All of this was purposefully designed to keep me trapped and dependent—to strip me of my rights to express my own thoughts, to practice a religion of my choosing, to rob me of the ability to speak about my experiences. Over many years and fighting tooth and nail, I'm here today despite their intentions to keep me helpless and silent.

This change in North Dakota's legal doctrine would be dangerous. It would result in more little girls growing up just like me, regardless of their educational approach. Right now in North Dakota, parents do not have absolute power to do this. Our worst impulses can be reasonably restrained. If this bill were to pass, however, parents like mine would be not just unchecked, but *empowered* by the law. I oppose senate bill 2188, and encourage the members of this committee to reject this possibly disastrous legislation.